

- 621 Each local group, whatever its size, had at least one permanent leader. In the small groups of a few lodges he was an outstanding person of ability and influence to whom lesser relatives and friends looked for guidance. He was the focal point of organization in their lives. The organization of such groups, so far as can be determined, was markedly similar to that which was characteristic for the aboriginal groups of the Great Basin in the days preceding white contact, as summarized by Dr. Julian Steward.¹² In the larger bands the identity of the "extended family-group" was submerged in the more embracing organization of the band, but not wholly lost. "Relatives tended to camp together." Whenever the band camp was moved, the same grouping of relatives tended to find its position in the new camp by establishing its location in relation to other "groups of relatives," so that the pattern of spacing within the camp retained a certain regularity. The large bands camped and functioned as units only during the summer season of dances and communal buffalo hunts. For a portion of the year the band was scattered and subdivided. Our data are not absolutely clear on this point, but the implication is that the break-up of the band was into the smaller "groups of relatives." Including, of course, the families of friends drawn within the orbit of the group. The family headmen, of which there was one for each camp-group, were the *pátsiño*, or peace chiefs (to distinguish them from the war leaders) of the band. When the compound band was camping and moving together as a unit it then contained several peace chiefs. On these occasions the peace chiefs appointed one of their number as leader for the season, with the remainder of the chiefs functioning as an advisory council for the group as a whole and at the same time maintaining their positions as family headmen to their own groups of followers.
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THE ECONOMIC BASE¹³

- 239 It is usual to speak of the Comanches as a tribe of hunters. Insofar as they depended primarily on game for sustenance, this is true. But it is equally true, and usually overlooked, that they were just as definitely a pastoral people. Great herds of horses were accumulated. The most notable form of [422] wealth was in this form of chattel: horses were individually owned by both men and women.

Though the horse was not a primary source of food, stories and case

¹² Julian Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 120, 1938).

¹³ The description of the material culture of the Comanches is a subject for separate treatment. This section is intended to serve merely as an orientation to Comanche subsistence methods.

Though the horse was not a primary source of food, strips and case histories reveal that horse meat was eaten on occasion and relished. In food-getting Comanche culture was basically a buffalo culture. [262]

As a beast of burden and as a means of personal transportation the horse had a fundamental value to the Comanche. In this respect the horse was a capital good. But the single individual could not effectively utilize more than a dozen horses in his personal string for use in war and hunting. [492]

Beyond this, horses were exceedingly acceptable as gifts and tokens of esteem. As gifts given in reciprocity for services rendered and as fees to medicine men, they served as an informal medium of exchange. As objects demandable in settlement of damage suits at law, they were a tangible form of material wealth endowed with legal and monetary significance. 431 422

In spite of all this, the great value of horses to the Comanche was a fiduciary value of inflated worth as prestige tokens, a value rooted in socio-psychological rather than economic factors. [554]

Though captured Mexican youths and children purchased from poverty-stricken Shoshone Indians served as herdsman, and the increase of herds through selective breeding was practiced by the Comanches, the basic factor in the acquisition and retaining of a large herd was the military skill of the owners. Thus it is that the possession of horses figured in the prestige competition which so constantly and vigorously activated the life of the Comanche male. 233 556 [567]

The size of Comanche herds was immense. Probably no Indians were more richly supplied than they. Upon the count of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Antelope band alone surrendered one thousand five hundred horses to the United States at the time of the capitulation at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, on June 2, 1875.¹⁷ A single Comanche, Big Fall By Tripping, is reputed among the Indians to have owned more than a thousand horses at one time.

The great communal hunts of the buffalo occurred during the summer months after the seasonal moulting was done and hides were in their prime. This was the season for the in-gathering of the bands. Sporadic and uncontrolled hunting of buffalo occurred whenever they were available during other seasons. 224

The time of the hunt was determined in democratic assembly at which everybody was welcome to listen, but in which the war leaders took the important part. The date for departure being set, the young and able-bodied men with their women left the main camp. Children and old persons remained behind. The expedition travelled light, taking very small and undecorated tipis and what weapons and tools were necessary.

¹⁷ Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Annual Report, Washington, 1875), p. 273.

population, cultivating 15,000 acres in tracts ranging from 5 to 160 acres.²³ 657
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Progress continued at about the same pace. In 1929 the crops were valued at \$400,000, the agricultural implements and vehicles at \$600,000, and the livestock at \$286,000, and the Indian Office was urging the unemployed to refrain from leasing any land that they could utilize profitably.²⁴ The lower values reported for agriculture during the next few years represent the effects of the depression rather than a retrogression. In 1942 the income from agriculture was approximately \$600,000. 657
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The principal crops include cotton, wheat, corn, alfalfa, oats, and sorghum. Cotton, with an average annual yield of about 150 pounds of lint per acre, has been the leading cash crop. The Washita and Red River bottoms are well adapted to corn, producing an average of thirty bushels an acre. Grain sorghums thrive on the uplands and are utilized as feed for livestock. Wheat, grown on the level and rolling plains, averages about twelve bushels an acre. The pasture land has been over-grazed and in 1945 had a carrying capacity of only one cow to seven acres. 241
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The Extension Service has rendered valuable assistance to the farmers. The older Indians are not interested, but the younger land owners are accepting its services. The Extension farm program has supervised and instructed the Indians in handling livestock, the preparation of the soil, the varieties of crops to plant, and methods of crop cultivation. It supervised the terracing of 18,646 acres of land in 1935. Farmers who terraced received concrete or masonry dams without cost.²⁵ 657
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Credit and rehabilitation have been another phase of the Extension Service program. The Wheeler-Howard Act of 1936 made federal loans available to worthy Indians engaged in farming. By June, 1945, a total of 331 loans amount- 657
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23. Superintendent Kiowa-Comanche Agency, Annual Report, September 1, 1918. [113]

24. *Ibid.*, op. cit., vol. II, 15-18, 24, 25.

25. Superintendent W. R. McCown, Annual Report: Narrative Section, 1935 (MR. Agency Office, Abilene), 17-18. [113]



BY J. A. DACUS

*Popular author and member of the staff of the
St. Louis Republican, 1871-80. Condensed from
an article in Ware's Valley Monthly, Volume I,
Number 1, St. Louis, May, 1875.*

The Comanches: An Ethnological Sketch (ca 1870)

THE COMANCHES number about fifteen thousand souls. Their former range extended from the sources of the Rio Brazos and Rio Colorado, of Texas, northward to the Canadian, and westward to the mountains of Colorado and New Mexico, and thence southward to the Rio Grande and the Mexican settlements of Nueva Leon and Coahuila. They are generally classed with the great nomadic Apache family. But the points of resemblance, I believe, are not sufficiently distinct to justify the classification. In form, feature, and language they have little likeness or affinity to the Apaches. Their traditions and symbolism and language, all point to a relationship with the Shoshones. The difference in the language spoken by these tribes is only dialectal. The separation must have taken place in the remote past. The cause which led to that separation, it is probable, will never be ascertained.

The name, Comanche, by which the people under consideration are distinguished, is not of their own bestowal. They call themselves *Neam*, which signifies men—the first, or original men. It is probable that their present name is a corruption of the Spanish word *comenzar* (pronounced *coman-thar*), which signifies “to begin.” The Comanches assert that they are THE men—the beginning men—or first men. In the effort to impart their distinctive claim, to strangers, they no doubt made use of signs signifying a commencement or beginning, and hence received from the early Spanish adventurers the title, *Los Pueblos Comenzar*: “The people to begin,” or the beginning people. It was afterward corrupted to Comanche, instead of *Comenzar*.

The Comanches are nomads, but not pastoral. They have horses, but keep no cattle, or sheep. They not do cultivate the soil, and confess themselves ignorant of the simplest arts of agriculture. Their food is procured by the chase. The women sometimes collect a few roots and plants, and some of the indigenous fruits of the plains, such as plums, certain kinds of berries, and the fig-like fruits of a species of cactus found on the Wichita

*DYEING, SPINNING AND WEAVING, BY THE CAM-
ANCHES, NAVAJOES, AND OTHER INDIANS OF
NEW MEXICO.*

By J. HENRY PETERS.

N
C THOMAS EWBANK, Esq.,

114 Dear Sir: Fully appreciating the heartiness and zeal, with
386 which you direct your researches into the various branches of
121 inquiry and learning connected with your important bureau, I
with great pleasure, but with diffidence, accede to your request,
and give you such information with regard to the manufactures
of wool and cotton, as I have acquired in my rambles among our
western Indians; and more especially, among the Camanches,
Navajoes, and Apaches of western Texas and southern New
Mexico. I have not been further west than Paso del Norte, in
Texas, nor further north than Sonora, in New Mexico, and the
surrounding county.

It is known to every observing traveler in those parts of our
country — now no longer remote — that the brilliancy and dura-
bility of the various shades of primitive colors, and the few semi-
colors that those Indians dye their wool in, are probably not
equalled by the learned and scientific chemists of Europe, and
our own country — an important fact, that seems not to have
excited the curiosity of our otherwise enquiring countrymen.
Should I be able, through your instrumentality, to bring to the
public notice, such facts as will lead to enquiry and investigation,
I should consider myself as having contributed somewhat to our
national advancement in one branch of the arts at least, and that
one of the most important.

● N
● C The Camanche, Navajoe, and Apache Indians, present the
233 curious spectacle of marauding bands of well mounted men;
721 seemingly always committing predatory incursions upon their
civilized neighbors, the Texans and Mexicans, apparently con-

¹ Reprinted from the Report of the U. S. Commission of Patents, for 1850, part 1.

[p. 352]
[pp 1- 351 not processed]

DYEING, SPINNING AND WEAVING BY THE CAMANCHES. 353

stantly on the alert for evil, and yet, possessing great skill in the more peaceful and benevolent habits of the herdsman and shepherd.

The depredations of the immense number of sheep, almost daily chronicled in our gazettes, are not made to appease hunger only; but to add to the already immense flocks that overspread, as I have been told by them, the region of country lying west of the Sierra Madre, and east of California.

In the spring and summer of 1843, in company with an old friend — one of the Creeks who had emigrated west of the Mississippi, soon after the treaty with them in 1832 — I traveled westward. My guide and companion had acquired a good knowledge of the language and habits of the Camanches, Navajoes and Apaches, and had probably not altogether abstained from joining them occasionally in their irruptions upon the settlements of their timid neighbors of Chihuahua and Sonoro. I found him "as one having authority," and of course, very useful, both in the protection he afforded me, and the information he enabled me to acquire.

Among the first objects of interest to me, next to the matchless feats of horsemanship they perform, and which have so often been written of — was the number and variety of articles wrought by them, both useful and ornamental, and which might well vie with the skill of more civilized artizans. Among these were the beautiful fabrics composed of wool, and a kind of grass cloth, and some few of cotton. The object, however, of greatest interest to me, was the art of imparting to wool, etc., the beautiful colors I had often before admired, and to this I gave most attention. Like other Indians, I found them unwilling to impart knowledge voluntarily, and I had in my previous and long intercourse with the western tribes, early learned not to make inquiries that might excite their special attention to my designs. Our Indians are not disposed to impart to their white brethren, unless their citizens, any thing that might be useful out of their own country, in which particular, they are not unlike the Chinese, so that with the exceptions of their modes of dyeing and spinning, I will not now attempt to give you any certain account. The information